

World First Australian Invention Revolutionises Outback Communications

Mobile communications are now available across the whole Australian continent, following today's launch of a new, satellite-based mobile phone system - the world's first offering full in-vehicle mobility - by Optus Communications.

MobileSat, developed over the past eight years by Optus and its development partners, will revolutionise communications in rural and remote areas - particularly for Australians working in the transport, mining, coastal marine and agricultural industries, or on isolated homesteads.

Existing mobile phone networks only provide coverage of around 3 per cent of the Australian land mass. However, MobileSat customers can make and receive calls *anywhere* in Australia, as their calls are relayed directly to and from Optus' B-series satellites 36,000 kilometres above the Earth.

The new service was officially launched by the Minister for Communications and the Arts, Michael Lee, when he called Optus Chairman, Sir Brian Inglis, who was using a MobileSat phone near Uluru in Central Australia. Speaking at the launch, Sir Brian said:

"This is an historic day. Today, Australian ingenuity has finally conquered the tyranny of distance within our vast continent, enabling *all* Australians to participate in the mobile phone revolution.

"The launch of MobileSat, the world's first satellite-based truly mobile phone service, will allow Australians living and working in the remotest parts of this country to stay in contact, and enjoy the safety, convenience and productivity benefits of mobile communications."

Using a MobileSat phone is as easy as using a normal cellular phone - unlike existing HF radio systems, which require specialist skills. Further, MobileSat phones are much more affordable than existing satellite communication systems, which use international, rather than Australian, satellites and do not offer true mobility). Optus MobileSat telephones cost a third of the price of their competitor, and attract call charges more than 20 per cent lower, thanks to the use of Optus' Australian satellites.

The ease of use, low cost and true mobile capability makes MobileSat particularly attractive to those who work in remote areas - for example, mining, transport and exploration companies; farmers; emergency services; professional fishermen etc.

MobileSat features:

- clear, reliable, more confidential calls: a significant advance on the unreliable HF radio party lines upon which many people in remote areas must currently rely;
- a coverage area that encompasses the whole of the Australian continent and coastal waters up to 200 kilometres from shore;
- an emergency call system with rapid access to '000' services and the Royal Flying Doctor Service;
- robust construction, built to withstand Australia's harsh conditions;
- simple operation, similar to a standard cellular mobile handset;
- the ability to connect a Global Positioning System receiver, which identifies the phone's precise location; and
- optional data, fax and messaging services (within two months).

MobileSat telephones comprise a handset and cradle, a transceiver unit 12x32x35cm, and a one metre rod antenna. The first MobileSat telephones are being supplied by NEC; Westinghouse will also supply telephones in the near future.

Demand for the new service is already strong. Optus has received many orders from companies which participated in pre-launch trials, and other companies aware that the service was about to be introduced.

In addition, overseas telecommunications carriers have expressed interest in the service, raising the prospect of eventual technology export opportunities.

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